

Global Transformations and Revolutionary Freedoms: Haiti and the Bajío in the Era of Independence

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First: Essential to study the complex politics—the pursuit of political freedoms—in the era of independence: Still: We will only understand the processes that led to nations—If we see the trans-atlantic and regional politics of independence in the context of Ongoing global economic transformations; And the social revolutions that transformed the two most economically dynamic regions of the Americas in the late eighteenth century Haiti, 1790-1804; the Bajío, 1810-1820. Such analysis, in turn, builds on new understanding of the roles of the Americas in the formative era of global capitalism, 1550-1800.

While we have focused on rethinking independence in creative ways—Others have been rethinking the origins of global capitalism. D. Flynn and A. Giráldez have generated studies of the role of Chinese demand for silver and American production from 1550-1750; showing the silver economies of Spanish America as pivotal engines of early modern commercial capitalism.

K. Pomeranz has shown how to 1800: China and Europe were equal and parallel participants in a multi-centered early commercial capitalism—and linked by New World silver. In that emerging vision of early globalization: Spanish American silver economies were pivotal participants: Andes-Potosí, 1570-1640

New Spain, especially Guanajuato, the Bajío, and regions north, 1700-1810; the most capitalist society in Americas during 18th century. Made money; stimulated and facilitated global trades; Forged a deeply commercialized and expansive society. Complemented by Atlantic sugar and slave economies; Pivotal to trade, production, accumulation in Europe Jamaica prime to c. 1780

Saint Domingue soaring post 1770—Dubois estimates that it stimulates c. 50% of commercial life in France.

Cuba emerging post 1760

Brazil struggling—sugar and slave economy peaked pre-1650;

Gold and slavery boomed 1700-1750, then faded yet faced regime extractions. In this understanding: Americas pivotal to emergence of capitalism in 18th century—with regional variations:

Post 1750, face key change: Chinese demand and premium price for silver waned. A lull in silver production in New Spain, 1750s-1760s; Then European demand rises: needs more silver to gain same quantity of Chinese wares.

New dynamism in New Spain, silver production doubles 1770-1790, high to 1810 Bajío north prime—reaching California, 1776.

Andes struggle; silver never revives; communities face population pressures and regime demands in stagnant economy—escalating popular risings, 1740-1785. Rio de la Plata, opened to stimulate Andes and Atlantic access—uncertain gains

Sugar economies: Jamaica peaks; Saint Domingue booms; Cuba begins; Brazil worries

British N. America—becoming US; From backwater support of Caribbean slave plantations to emerging supplier of cotton to industrializing Britain—Begins dynamic expansion of slave south; All in context of Atlantic imperial trade rivalries and rising wars. All European empires seek silver—or ways to gain it in trade, contraband, war. In process: US first to independence: Least valuable of colonies; costly for Britain to maintain. Still, model independence to American elites—escape colonial rule; Keep social order—including slavery.

New Spain's silver funds US independence; peso become dollar. France provides troops, naval support: costly; faces bankruptcy by 1789

Bankruptcy of French monarchy—leads to French revolution French revolution creates context for Haitian revolution. In decade of bloody conflict—slaves end French rule; slavery; and plantation production—take land for family sustenance

Second model of American independence: Unacceptable to elites everywhere. If promise of U.S. independence opened imagined possibilities across the Americas; Outcome of Haitian revolution stymied thoughts of independence among those with power—and eyes for profit.

Simultaneously; loss of Haiti deprived Napoleon of key resources while locked in competition with Britain for European and Atlantic power. Lost trade and revenues of Saint Domingue; Lost soldiers to disease in attempts to reconquer; Lost naval-maritime power sustained by Caribbean trades Confirmed by losses at Trafalgar, 1805

Every analyst knows that Iberian-American independence set off by Napoleon's invasion of Portugal and then Spain. 1807-1808 Why? Napoleon has lost revenues of French Americas: The context of his turn against Lisbon, then Madrid. What does he seek? Lisbon a British ally;

Brazil, primary beneficiary of Haitian revolution: sugar revived; coffee expanded; slaves imports rise; revenue and trade benefit Port-Brit alliance.

Napoleon seeks to conquer Portugal—of limited value, except to block British access to continent; Seeks access to rising wealth of Brazil?

How with limited navy and British command of Atlantic?

British take Portuguese court to Rio—Brazil will profit Britain—through 19th century. Then Napoleon turns on his Spanish ally.

Was goal New Spain's silver? If so understandable: 2/3 already benefit French-Spanish alliance; 1/3 to Britain in trade (Marichal)

Napoleon might gain all? Improbable as Britain rules sea lanes.

Whatever Napoleon's goal, Spanish popular resistance, May 1808, foils; Set off imperial crisis: leads to war of resistance in Spain, liberal regime in Cádiz allies with Britain—draws silver to fight Napoleon also creates crisis of sovereignty across empire. In New Spain, debates about sovereignty amid deepening drought and famine, lead to Hidalgo revolt, Sept 1810—focus of bicentennial. Hidalgo revolt collapsed early 1811—as political challenge. Morelos, others carry on war for sovereignty—eventually independence.

People of Bajío press decade of social revolution, 1810-1820. Reject Spanish rule: both Cadiz, then restored Fernando; deny established property; take land from commercial estates—build family ranchos; sustain selves and insurgents for a decade; allow new roles for women as *rancheras*—as men fight, move on.

Meanwhile, richest silver mines in world left without investment in infrastructure; short of workers; must buy supplies from insurgents; Can only ship with armed convoys (Romero Sotelo)

Silver production declines—to collapse in 1820, with flooding of Valenciana. Production in 1820: 20% of 1810 Simultaneously, 1818-1820, rural Bajío “pacified”—by allowing former insurgents to keep family ranchos, for small rents (many run by women). Bajío parallel to Haiti not in claiming political independence, nor ending slavery, long gone--But in forcing a shift to family production; undermining capitalist dynamism in regions that were primary engines of New World production and global trade.

As Mexico became independent in 1821—faced well know questions of empire or republic; centralism or federalism; soon, conservatism or liberalism.

All debated in context of the collapse of the economy that had made New Spain rich—and globally important.

While struggling to forge a nation, Mexico had to find a new economy, a new role in a changing capitalist world. Now wonder decades of conflict and instability opened way for U.S. conquest of Mexican north to create US West.

Thus:

Amid global transformation of capitalism: Demise of multi-centered global trades driven by Chinese demand and American silver—paralleled and facilitated

Rise of British industrial textile capitalism; sustained by US cotton and slavery;

Nearly every region of Americas faced challenge of building nations that were emerging little planned from imperial conflicts--While searching for new economies in a changing world;

Haiti isolated—by ex-slaves choice and penalty of the powerful.

Mexico: to revive silver or turn to industry?—in face of popular resistance; while losing territories and resources for expansion and development.

Central America—dye economy in context of British trade power

Andes—deal with end of silver; search for new products

Rio de la Plata—begin turn to producing sustenance for Britain

Brazil—after brief sugar revival, soared with coffee and slavery.

With economic prospects and limited wars for independence—The great “success” of 19th-century Latin America Cuba—booms with last rise of sugar and slavery; remains colony; delays independence.

All linked—in diverse ways—to rise of British industrial power.

US favored as primary cotton supplier; early industrial competitor in North; western expansion, mining booms in lands once Mexican. This is a minimal sketch of complex developments; much to learn and understand. But a key emphasis clear: we will not understand complex trajectories toward independence, nor the often uncertain decades of early nation life, until we integrate analyses of: A changing global economy the complex politics of empires and independence and the causes and consequences, regionally and beyond, of the social revolutions in Haiti and the Bajío that took down the leading engines of American capitalism—just as most of the Americas claimed the independence to build nations.